

## Executive Briefing Introduction

**“Executive Briefing” summarises the business of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s Board at its meeting on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2011 at 10.00am in the Boardroom, Housing Centre, Belfast BT2 8PB**

Further information on any matters in this document can be obtained from:

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**Members Present:** Mr Brian Rowntree (Chairman)  
Mrs Anne Henderson (Vice Chair)  
Mrs Angela Coffey  
Cllr Brendan Curran  
Mrs Edna Dunbar  
Cllr Jenny Palmer  
Cllr Jim Speers

**Apologies:** Mr Ken Millar  
Cllr Eamonn O’Neill  
Dr Monica Wilson

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## **GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **1.0 Business Plan Monitor**

- 1.1 The Board noted the Housing Executive's Business Plan Monitor for the year to January 2011. The Monitor shows progress against the Business Plan's six Corporate Objectives.

While performance against the majority of targets is good concerns remain around future funding. The Housing Executive continues to liaise closely with the Department for Social Development, and is currently assessing the costs of the repairs bill arising from the spell of cold weather in December 2010/ January 2011.

### **2.0 Draft Corporate Plan 2011/12 to 2014/15**

The Board approved the draft Corporate and Business Plans 2011/12 to 2013/14, which will be issued for a short consultation.

- 2.1 Following a short consultation period, a further paper will be brought to the March Board meeting and will then be submitted for Departmental / Ministerial approval.
- 2.2 The draft plans include the financial budget figures and programme numbers which are still the subject of discussion with the DSD. It had been intended to carry out a fundamental review of the Plans this year but, because of the uncertainties around funding and the DSD review of the Housing Executive, it was agreed to defer the review. In future, the Housing Executive's planning cycle should be aligned with the Comprehensive Spending Review, i.e. a formal review every three years. The overall size of the document has been reduced without losing critical detail.
- 2.3 The Key Priorities section includes content on the following:
- a) New house building;
  - b) Maintenance and improvement;
  - c) Promoting energy efficiency and helping to combat fuel poverty;
  - d) Tackling the housing needs of people with disabilities;

- e) Community safety;
- f) Better community relations, community development, participation and cohesion;
- g) Better housing for the Traveller community;
- h) Urban and rural regeneration.

## **STRATEGIES AND POLICIES**

### **3.0 Housing Selection Scheme – Draft Preliminary Consultation**

The Board approved the aspects of the Housing Selection Scheme which have been identified for consideration and approved the draft consultation paper which will be submitted to the Department for launch by the Minister.

#### **3.1 The issues identified for consultation in the draft preliminary consultation paper are:**

- a) Intimidation - The consultation will seek views on the appropriateness of the existing arrangements and on possible alternative options.
- b) Unsuitable Accommodation - Views will be sought on the merits of revising the existing criteria for the award of Unsuitable Accommodation Points as well as the appropriate weight to be attached to such circumstances.
- c) Homeless Applicants in Temporary Accommodation - It is suggested that additional Interim Accommodation Points should be awarded incrementally to recognise time spent by Full Duty Applicants, FDAs in temporary accommodation. Further analysis is necessary to consider the pool of applicants eligible for these points and the weighting and sequencing of any such additional points.
- d) Transfer of Tenants – Anti-Social Behaviour - Access criteria for transfers is currently detailed in the Guidance associated with the Scheme, however, views will be sought on the merits of amending the Rules of the Scheme to specify eligibility criteria for a transfer within social housing within the Statutory Scheme.

- 3.2 Work will continue on finalising the precise wording and detail of the draft consultation paper before forwarding to the Department for Ministerial authorisation to proceed to formal consultation next month.
- 3.3 During the preliminary consultation process, work will continue with the research unit on further modelling and analysis of the possible options for change to assess possible impact on applicants' position and rank on the waiting list and engaging with key stakeholders, including NIFHA and the Housing Council who will also be involved in working up any specific amendments to the Housing Selection Scheme arising from the consultation exercise.

#### **4.0 NIHE Response to Northern Ireland Executive Economic Strategy: Consultation on Growth and Prosperity**

The Board approved the Housing Executive's response to the Northern Ireland Executive's Economic Strategy "Consultation on Priorities for Sustainable Growth and Prosperity".

- 4.1 The Executive Sub Committee believes that the central focus for the Economic Strategy should be to reduce reliance on the public sector and rebalance the economy based on export-led economic growth.
- 4.2 The Housing Executive broadly agrees with the NI Executive's Economic Strategy and recognises the importance of rebalancing the economy and growing the private sector and export led growth. However, the Housing Executive believes that rebalancing of the economy is a long-term goal and that cutting the public sector dramatically without increasing growth rates in the private sector, carries risks.
- 4.3 The Housing Executive considers that housing plays an important role in the economy of Northern Ireland. The recovery of a more buoyant housing market, with sustainable and realistic house price growth, increased rates of construction and consumer confidence, will play an important element in a future growing economy in NI. Increased investment in social housing could help to both tackle the need for more affordable homes and at the same time support the construction industry and employment opportunities with much needed work.

4.4 We believe that housing issues that can assist economic growth are as follows:

- a) Regeneration can attract inward investment to NI. The Housing Executive welcomes further opportunities to work on regeneration partnership initiatives in the future.
- b) Low carbon and green technologies could become an important industry in Northern Ireland. The Housing Executive actively promotes the use of renewable energy in homes.
- c) The Strategy states those undertaking social housing or urban regeneration contracts should provide work experience for the unemployed. The Steps to Work Programme provides 26 week or 13-week placement opportunities providing practical work experience, working towards a vocational qualification or Essential Skills training.

## **5.0 Second Update on Impact of Budget Proposals on Housing Benefit**

The Board noted the changes to the timetable for the introduction of the new legislation and the plan for communication with prospective and existing customers.

5.1 Since the last update provided to the Board in September 2010, the government has announced some changes to the implementation dates for the changes to Local Housing Allowance scheduled for 2011. The changes proposed for 2011 will come into force in April for all new claims while, for existing claimants, the changes will be delayed until nine months after the anniversary date of their claim in order to provide existing claimants with a measure of transitional protection.

5.2 Once the legislation is published for Northern Ireland, HB Policy Unit will implement a Communications Plan to publicise the changes. A general campaign using press advertising will be run during March 2011 to raise awareness among potential new HB claimants and landlords. All existing claimants and landlords will receive individual notification of the changes at the beginning of April. An assessment will be undertaken later in the year as to whether or not a second phase of public awareness is required.

## **6.0 The 2011 District Housing Plan / Local Housing Strategy (using Newry & Mourne as a template)**

The Board approved the 2011/12 Newry and Mourne template for release, which will be used for the remaining 25 District Housing Plans.

- 6.1 The Housing Executive has a statutory requirement to consult with Councils annually on housing programmes and performance. We do this through the presentation to the 26 Councils using the District Housing Plans/Local Housing Strategies.
- 6.2 Following the DHP review meeting in November 2011 which was attended by the Director of Corporate Services, Assistant Directors and Area Managers, a number of areas for change were identified. These changes have been worked into the template and are:
  - a) Section 2 to be shortened;
  - b) Extend funding information to include Warm Homes;
  - c) Differentiate between income/fuel poverty and energy efficiency measures;
  - d) Insert customer service/ arrears performance information into objective 6;
  - e) Streamline layout where possible.
- 6.3 Additional information has been included under corporate objective 6 in relation to our major incident plan.
- 6.4 A broad template document was prepared using Newry & Mourne District and submitted to Board for approval and this will be further shortened and used as the general template for the other 25 District Housing Plans.
- 6.5 Presentation to Councils is generally held during June and July subject to Council availability. The elections will take place during May 2011. Meetings with Councils have been arranged from June, and the first meetings are on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June for Armagh and Newtownabbey Councils.



## **7.0 2011 House Condition Survey**

The Board noted the proposed approach, costs and savings for the 2011 House Condition Survey.

- 7.1 The House Condition Survey undertaken in 2009 was the first in the series to employ an electronic approach to data collection using tablet computers. The application of this new technology was successful with preliminary findings presented to the Board in February 2010 - nearly six months earlier than for previous surveys – and the final statistical tables published on the Housing Executive’s website in October 2010 - approximately one year earlier than for the 2006 HCS.
- 7.2 The 2011 HCS will follow a similar approach with significant financial savings not only from the tablet based approach, but also from the partnership approach with BRE. As in 2009, the survey will use the software and a website already developed by BRE for DCLG.
- 7.3 The overall aim of the 2011 survey will be to provide a robust assessment – both at the Northern Ireland and at the existing District Council level of the following key housing indicators: unfitness, disrepair, Decent Homes, Housing Health and Safety Rating, energy efficiency (including SAP rating) and Fuel Poverty.
- 7.4 The methodology employed for the 2011 Survey remains broadly the same as in 2009. However, one significant area of change will be in relation to the sample. Given the pressure to deliver further savings to the research (surveys) budget, as outlined in the Department for Social Development’s Draft Budget (January 2010), the HCS Steering Group has agreed to reduce the sample size from 3,000 to 2,000, providing further savings of approximately £200,000. On its own this would make it impossible to deliver robust figures for the housing conditions for each of the District Councils. However, this becomes possible by making use of the data available from the 2011 Census (using a paired case approach to develop a suitable linear regression model). Senior demographers in NISRA have agreed to undertake this exercise on a collaborative basis.

The 2011 HCS will also build on the expertise and experience of surveyors involved in the 2009 electronic HCS, thereby reducing training costs and ensuring data quality.

The Board notes the proposed approach, costs and further cost savings of approximately £200,000 for the 2011 House Condition Survey.

## **8.0 Review of the Housing Executive’s Disability Action Plan**

The Board noted the amendment to the Housing Executive’s Disability Action Plan and the mechanisms for issues and actions to be raised through the Consultative Forum. The Board also noted that the Plan may require further amendments which will be brought back to the Board.

8.1 The disability duties (Section 49a Disability Discrimination Act 1995) require public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

8.2 The Housing Executive began a process of consultation with the Equality Commission and a wide range of disability representative groups and disabled staff members and customers. The seminars concluded that, in relation to housing, the Housing Executive should concentrate on two themes:

- a) Ensuring the Housing Executive mainstreams communication processes that remove barriers experienced by disabled people (and also linguistic and literacy barriers);
- b) Establish an effective framework for the engagement of disabled people in the work of the Housing Executive.

8.3 The seminar also concluded and made a recommendation that a number of ineffective actions in the action plan should be removed, subject to Board approval.

8.4 The revised plan included the above actions and included actions related to employment, learning and development, staff training, screening policies, community development and influencing partner and third party organisations.

## **9.0 Housing, Health and Wellbeing**

The Board noted the progress to date taking forward the proposals for adopting an outcomes based approach to the Housing Executive's activities.

At the October 2010 meeting the Board approved proposals to review NIHE's approach to Housing Health and Wellbeing. The following is an update on each of the key proposals.

### **9.1 Evaluate the Supporting People Outcomes pilot**

The evaluation process for the pilot study is due to complete by the end of March 2011. It is anticipated this will incorporate the approach as a key theme of the new Supporting People strategy. The Housing Executive is currently in contact with the lead agency in GB for outcomes monitoring for Supporting People, with a view to establishing an arrangement for Northern Ireland. The Supporting People outcomes model as supported by Communities and Local Government is now being adopted by local authorities for a range of other non-Supporting People services.

### **9.2 Investigate the potential use of Belfast Healthy Cities' support to evaluate an outcomes based programme for the NI**

The Housing Executive has engaged with Belfast Healthy Cities (BHC) to evaluate the outcome based approach initially within Supporting People. BHC will examine the 'Outcomes Monitoring Report' and has undertaken to provide feedback by summer 2011 on its applicability across the Supporting People programme and its potential for the remainder of the Housing Executive. The initial meeting of the Housing Executive inter-divisional group, established to consider further the potential application of this HHEILP toolkit and the benefits of adopting an outcomes-based approach across key NIHE areas, is scheduled for March 2011.

9.3 Review NIHE’s Corporate Objectives against the NI Executive’s Programme for Government’s (PfG) Public Service Agreement (PSA) Framework in relation to promoting health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities

Since October 2010 a review of the Housing Executive’s Corporate Plan against the PSA framework has been undertaken. A total of nine PSAs, with sixteen associated objectives, have been identified which can demonstrate the impact of housing, health and wellbeing in relation to ongoing areas of Housing Executive work. This covers areas such as the Social Housing Development Programme, Supporting People, Disabled Facilities Grants and adaptations, energy efficiency and energy conservation measures, etc. The review of the approach above has highlighted a number of issues which need to be addressed:

- a) Examining existing evidence bases and potential additional data sources
- b) Agreement on the outcomes and data sources
- c) Further awareness needed of an outcomes approach which may require training

9.5 Developing a robust reporting framework for outcomes which could be applicable across the NIHE

A series of actions identified for developing a robust outcomes reporting framework across the Housing Executive are underway. This will entail translating housing indicators and outputs into outcomes which will be achieved against wider housing, health and wellbeing outcomes and the associated Public Service Agreements (PSAs) for the Northern Ireland government. In particular, it is anticipated that the Housing Executive’s inter-divisional group will be the medium to take forward the outcomes approach across the organisation. There is increasing impetus and momentum across the public sector in relation to delivering better outcomes for people, realising the benefits of an outcomes based approach and reporting on same.

## **10.0 Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) and Migrant Worker Mapping Update 2010**

The Board noted an update report mapping the BME and migrant worker communities. The Board approved the publication and circulation of the report to relevant stakeholders.

- 10.1 This fifth annual mapping report sets out an analysis of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and migrant worker households across Northern Ireland. The core aim of this Equality Unit project is to track the current BME and migrant worker populations by Housing Executive District / Local Government District, and to develop and improve our understanding of the flow of migrant workers in Northern Ireland.
- 10.2 In addition to key population and employment statistics, the report includes a survey of NIHE District Offices, a case study of Armagh, Craigavon, Dungannon, Newry and South Belfast districts and an overview of recent external research.
- 10.3 In 2008/09 and 2009/10 there has been a clear decline in numbers coming to Northern Ireland. The key reason for the fall in numbers is the fact that the main “pull” factor, employment, has declined. Although the key indicators show falling numbers of migrant workers moving to Northern Ireland, activity associated with the work of the Housing Executive has increased or at best levelled off. Anecdotal information from our Districts suggests that there is a core of settled migrant families who are increasingly aware of their housing choices and how to access them. It was estimated that 81% of the 653 migrant worker tenant households at 31<sup>st</sup> July 2010 were families.
- 10.4 A key change in terms of eligibility will occur from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2011 when the Workers Registration Scheme will be discontinued under E.U. law. The A8 countries will no longer be considered to be accession states and their nationals will enjoy the same rights as those of the other established E.U. member states. This will remove a barrier for migrant workers previously found ineligible to apply for social housing due to either not having registered under the Workers Registration Scheme or not having completed one year of continuous employment. This change may impact on Housing Executive workloads with increasing numbers of migrant workers and their families eligible to use our services.

10.5 It is also worth noting that transitional restrictions placed on Bulgaria and Romania (i.e. the A2 countries) will be lifted no later than 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014. Again this transition could result in increasing Housing Executive workloads.

10.6 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 NIHE Housing Activity / Trends

	31 Jul 2007	31 Jul 2008	31 Jul 2009	31 Jul 2010
Migrant worker households applying for social housing in the one year period	998	1,055	1,225	1,368
Migrant worker households allocated social housing in one year	202	143	205	256
Migrant worker tenant households on each date	353	353	503	653
An estimated 81% of migrant worker households were families and just 19% single person households.				
Applications received from migrant worker households applying as homeless in the one year period	469	342	455	517
Migrant worker households awarded full duty applicant (FDA) status in one year	Not recorded	172	189	237
Between 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2009 and 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2010 there were 979 recorded applications for Housing Benefit from migrant worker households				

## **11.0 Appointments and Promotions**

The Board approved the procedure for the recruitment of ex-Housing Executive employees for short term duties.

11.1 A recent Audit recommended that management carry out a review of the processes by which retired staff may be recruited to provide short term or ad hoc services to the Housing Executive.

11.2 In normal circumstances where a temporary resource is required the resourcing solution would be:

- a) To initiate an internal or external recruitment exercise within the policy on Appointments and Promotions; and, directly employ the successful candidate;
- b) To seek an agency worker in line with the provisions of the Government Procurement Contract regarding employment agencies, in which we are a participant.

11.3 Where there are exceptional circumstances in regard to the need for a temporary resource then a departure from the normal procedures in regard to temporary recruitment may be permitted. This is subject to:

- a) Recommendation by the relevant Director;
- b) Approval by the Director of Personnel and Management Services

11.4 The actual recruitment of the individual concerned, on the basis of approval gained as above, will be undertaken by the Recruitment Services Manager who will issue a temporary employment contract as indicated in the approval documentation.

## **12.0 Funding of the Northern Ireland Energy Agency and National Energy Action (NI)**

The Board approved funding for the Northern Ireland Energy Agency and the National Energy Action Northern Ireland for 2011/12.

12.1 In delivering its Home Energy Conservation responsibilities, the Housing Executive has Service Level Agreements (SLA) with two voluntary bodies - NI Energy Agency and National Energy Action, the local fuel poverty charity. The Housing Executive has agreed to provide funding to both organisations, who will provide a range of services outlined in the SLAs in 2011/12.

### **13.0 Supporting People Service Development**

13.1 The Board approved proposals for the development of Supporting People schemes at:

- a) Longstone Resettlement, Dungannon – 24 units for people with learning disabilities from Longstone Hospital. Developed by Southern Health & Social Care Trust (SHSCT) and endorsed by Southern Area Supporting People and the Supporting people Commissioning Body;
- b) Older People, Kilkeel – 12 units for people in the 65~+ age bracket. Developed by Southern Health & Social Care Trust (SHSCT) and endorsed by Southern Area Supporting People and the Supporting people Commissioning Body;
- c) Shankill House Replacement, Belfast – 35 units for people with dementia. Developed by Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (BHSCT) and endorsed by Eastern Area Supporting People and the Supporting people Commissioning Body.

### **14.0 Transfer of Vacant Dwellings and Adjacent Land in Springfarm Estate, Antrim to Clanmil Housing Association**

The Board approved the transfer of 59 vacant dwellings to Clanmil Housing Association for reinstatement and allocation for social housing. However it was agreed that two of the properties originally programmed for refurbishment will be redeveloped instead. Board approval is subject to successful local consultation and the submission of a final proposal for Board approval. The proposal to transfer the adjacent open space in the original sale boundary to Clanmil will be revisited at a later date.

### **15.0 Transfer of Land at Kilcooley Square, Bangor to Kilcooley Allotments Ltd**

The Board approved the leasing arrangement for the transfer of land at Kilcooley Square, Bangor to Kilcooley Allotments Ltd and noted the potential future request to consider support for Phase 2 for a Healthy Living Centre.



- 15.1 Kilcooley Community Forum aimed to create and maintain a community garden for the benefit and enjoyment of the local community. The two elements of the community allotment garden are the Health Living Centre and a separate allotments site. The transfer of land is on the basis of a leasing arrangement for a period of 15 years, subject to five year reviews, at a peppercorn rent.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **16.0 NIHE Scheme Design Approvals**

<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Work Content</b>	<b>Start Date</b>
<b><u>South Area</u></b> Druid's Villas, Armagh	Infrastructure Improvements	Feb 2011

### **17.0 Northern Ireland Assembly Questions**

The Board noted details of recent housing related Assembly Questions.

- 17.1 During the period 3<sup>rd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> January 2011, 99 Assembly Questions were tabled for response by the Minister for Social Development. Of these 78 were housing related.